

Frequently asked questions

Why do you need to test the water?

Waukesha County Parks is committed to giving our customers the best swim experience; making safety our first priority.

Testing for Water Quality is done weekly at all Waukesha County Beaches and twice at Fox Brook and Menomonee Parks. Water is also tested after a heavy rainfall. The County has tested water quality since 1970, before there were any state guidelines for testing. Water quality testing is done as a precaution to warn customers when bacteria levels are high.

What are you testing for?

Beach water may contain microorganisms that you cannot see. One of those microorganisms is *E. coli*. *E. coli* is found in feces of animals, including humans.

What is *E. coli*?

E. coli is the abbreviated name for *Escherichia coli*. The name *E. coli* encompasses a wide range of bacteria, some which help us and some of which hurts us. About 0.1% of the total bacteria within an adult's intestines is represented by *E. coli*. The presence of *E. coli* and other bacteria within our intestines is necessary for us to develop and operate properly. *E. coli* we acquire from our surroundings can sometimes be harmful to us. The presence of *E. coli* in swimming areas means that other disease-causing microorganisms may be present as well.



What illness can I get from swimming in polluted water?

Micro organisms found in polluted water can cause flu-like systems, such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, and fever. Other germs can cause ear infections, eye infections, and skin rashes. Due to the Waukesha County's water sampling and beach closing procedures, exposure to potential causes of illness is reduced.

What signage will be posted?



"Good" signage will be posted when water counts are under 235, the EPA's good water quality guideline.

Beach "Advisory" signage



If a sample has an *E. coli* count over 235, "Advisory" signage will be posted. Additional samples will be taken immediately and the beach advisory will remain in place until two consecutive days have counts below 235. "Advisory" is in effect when counts exceed the EPA's good water quality guidelines, but does not warrant closing the beach at that time.

Beach "Closed" signage



Beaches will close and signage posted when a sample has an *E. coli* count greater than 1000. Additional samples will be taken immediately and the beach will reopen only when two consecutive days have counts below 1000.

What causes beach pollution?

There are many sources of *E. coli* bacteria, including the following:

- Animal droppings from geese, dogs, etc.
- Runoff from residential streets and yards
- Children having "accidents" in the water

What can I do to reduce the *E. coli* levels at Waukesha County Beaches?

- ♦ Please do not swim when you have diarrhea. This is especially important for kids in diapers. You can spread germs in the water and make other people sick.
- ♦ Please practice good hygiene. Take a shower before swimming and wash your hands after using the toilet or changing a diaper. Germs on your body end up in the water.
- ♦ Please take your kids on bathroom breaks or check diapers often. Waiting to hear "I have to go" may mean that it's too late.
- ♦ Please change diapers in a bathroom and not on the beach. It is suggested to use rubber pants or swim diapers while swimming.
- ♦ Please wash your child thoroughly (especially the rear end) with soap and water before swimming. Everyone has invisible amounts of fecal matter on their bottoms that end up in the water.
- ♦ Please do not feed the geese or other waterfowl.
- ♦ Please do not bring your pet on the beach and properly dispose of your pet's waste.